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# Qualifications and work

This publication presents detailed information about the educational qualification of people and the relevance to their working lives

Reference period 2015

Released 22/06/2016

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## Summary of findings

### Qualifications and the labour market

Education plays an important role in preparing individuals for entry into the labour force, and ensuring they have the skills necessary for on-going employment and life-long learning. Over recent decades there has been an increased demand for vocational and higher education qualifications across many industries. This has resulted in a steady increase in the proportion of the working-age population with non-school qualifications.

In 2015, 9.4 million (61%) Australians aged 15–64 years had a non-school qualification, up from 8.7 million (59%) in 2010–11 (Table 1 and [Learning and Work, Australia 2010–11 \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/85ACE41D49040DAECA257FD90018B8AD?opendocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/85ACE41D49040DAECA257FD90018B8AD?opendocument) (cat. no. 4235.0)). More than three quarters (82%) of people with a non-school qualification were employed compared with 61% of those without a non-school qualification. In 2010–11, 84% of Australians with a non-school qualification and 63% of those without were employed (Table 2).

An estimated 3.5 million (23%) Australians aged 15–64 years held two or more non-school

qualifications, with more women (24%) than men (22%) having completed multiple qualifications. Women with two or more non-school qualifications were more likely than those with one qualification to be employed (80% compared with 74%). In comparison there was little difference in employment rates amongst men with one or two or more non-school qualifications (87% and 88%) (Table 1).

Average personal weekly income increased with the number of non-school qualifications completed. Men working full-time, who held two or more non-school qualifications, earned on average \$813 per week more than their full-time working counterparts without a non-school qualification. Similarly, full-time employed females with multiple non-school qualifications earned an average \$504 per week more than those working full-time without a non-school qualification (Table 3).

## **Relevance of qualification to current job**

Whilst the proportion of working-aged people with non-school qualifications has increased, workers may be employed in fields that have little relevance to their qualifications. In this section, the term 'working in the field of their qualification' indicates that an individual is using their qualification for the purpose of which the qualification was originally intended. It implies the person is a good fit for the job, due to having specific skills and knowledge. This is most likely to occur in specialist fields, such as medicine, nursing and teaching. The term 'relevant' refers to people working in the field of their highest qualification, or if not, whose highest qualification is still relevant to their job. An individual not working in a job where their qualification is relevant may be due to a number of reasons including that there is low demand for jobs in a certain field (not the person's choice), or that the pay is significantly less.

In 2015, it was estimated that 44% (5.0 million) of the 11.3 million employed Australians aged 15–64 years had a non-school qualification and worked in the field of their highest qualification. An additional 11% of employed people, had at least one non-school qualification and described their highest as relevant to their current job, even though they were not working in the same field. As such, 55% of employed people held a non-school qualification that was relevant to their job (Table 4).

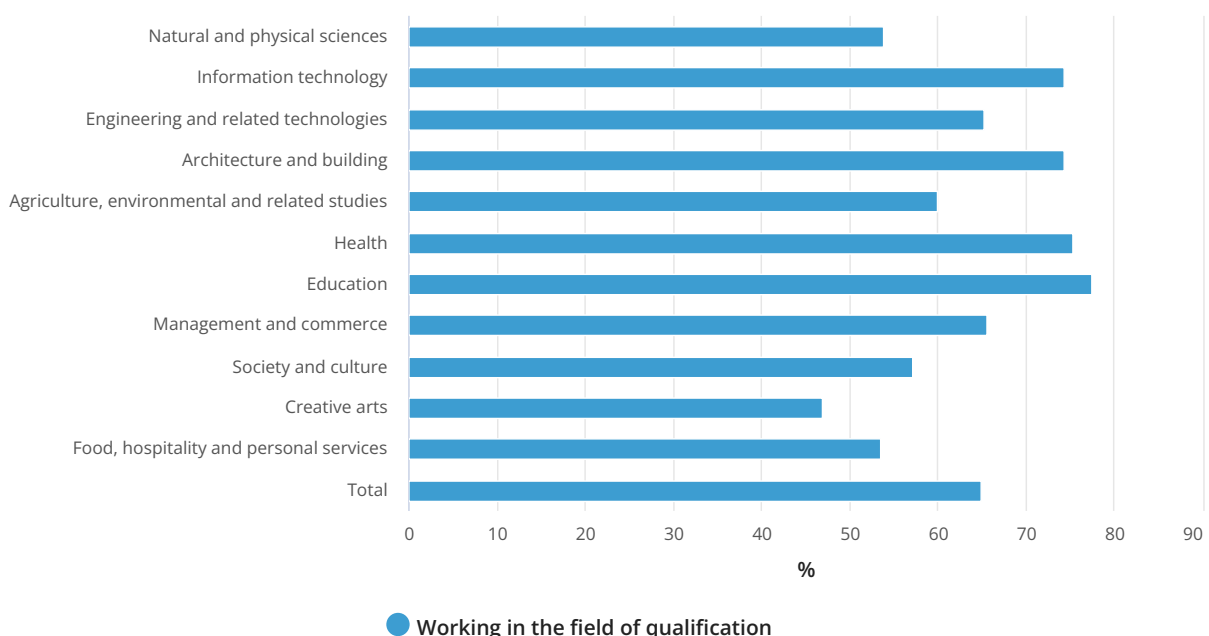
More than six out of ten (63%) employed people aged 25–34 years, and a similar proportion (62%) of those aged 35–44 years, had a non-school qualification and were employed in a job relevant to their highest non-school qualification. In comparison, only 54% of employed people aged 55–64 years worked in a job where their highest qualification was relevant, up from 49% in 2010–11, even though the proportion of 55–64 year olds with a qualification had remained stable (65%) (Table 4 and Learning and Work, Australia 2010–11).

People employed in the Education and training industry (80%) and Professional, scientific and technical services (79%) were most likely to be employed in jobs relevant to their highest non-school qualification. Only 26% of people employed in Accommodation and food services and 29% in Retail trade industries had a relevant non-school qualification (Table 6).

Almost three quarters (72%) of employed Australians whose highest qualification was a postgraduate award, such as a Doctorate, Masters degree or Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate, worked in the field of their qualification, compared with only 64% of people whose highest non-school qualification was a Certificate level (Table 8).

Some fields of study had higher proportions of people working within the same field as their highest non-school qualification. Australians whose highest non-school qualification was within the fields of Education (78%), Health (75%), Information technology (74%) and Architecture and building (74%) were the most likely to be working in the field of their highest non-school qualification (Table 8 and Graph 1).

**Graph 1: Working in the field of highest non-school qualification - by main field of highest non-school qualification(a)**



a. Persons aged 15 to 64 years with a non-school qualification

Employed people who completed their highest non-school qualification within the last five years (between 2010–2015) were more likely than those who completed their highest qualification more than 15 years ago (before 2000), to be working in the same field as their highest non-school qualification (70% compared with 60% respectively). This may suggest people move into other occupations over time as they gain experience in the workforce, or qualifications lose their relevance over time (Table 8).

In 2015, an estimated 1.5 million (13%) employed people worked in a job where their highest non-school qualification was not relevant. The reasons for this included; a lack of positions in a relevant field (26%), no longer interested in the field (26%) and being comfortable in their current job (21%). More than half (53%) the people whose highest qualification was within the field of Creative arts reported a lack of available positions as a reason why they were not working in a relevant field. Only 17% of people whose highest qualification was in Education reported a lack of available positions as a reason not to be working in a relevant field (Table 4 and Table 9).

## **Incomplete qualifications**

A qualification is considered incomplete if it was stopped before the completion of all academic requirements, regardless of whether the person intends to complete the qualification at some point in the future. It does not include people who are currently studying a course.

In 2015, 2.7 million (18%) Australians aged 15–64 years had at least one incomplete non-school qualification. Of these, Bachelor degrees were the most common (37%) incomplete non-school qualification, followed by Certificate level qualifications (34%) (Table 12).

Both employed and unemployed people were more likely than those not in the labour force (18% and 19% compared with 14%) to have an incomplete non-school qualification. This is partly because younger working aged people 25–34 and 35–44 years (22% and 20% respectively) were more likely than people in other age groups to have an incomplete qualification. There was little difference in the proportion of men and women with an incomplete non-school qualification (17% compared to 18%). Drop out rates were similar amongst those who had completed a non-school qualification (18%) and those who had not (17%) (Table 12).

## **Migrants and qualifications**

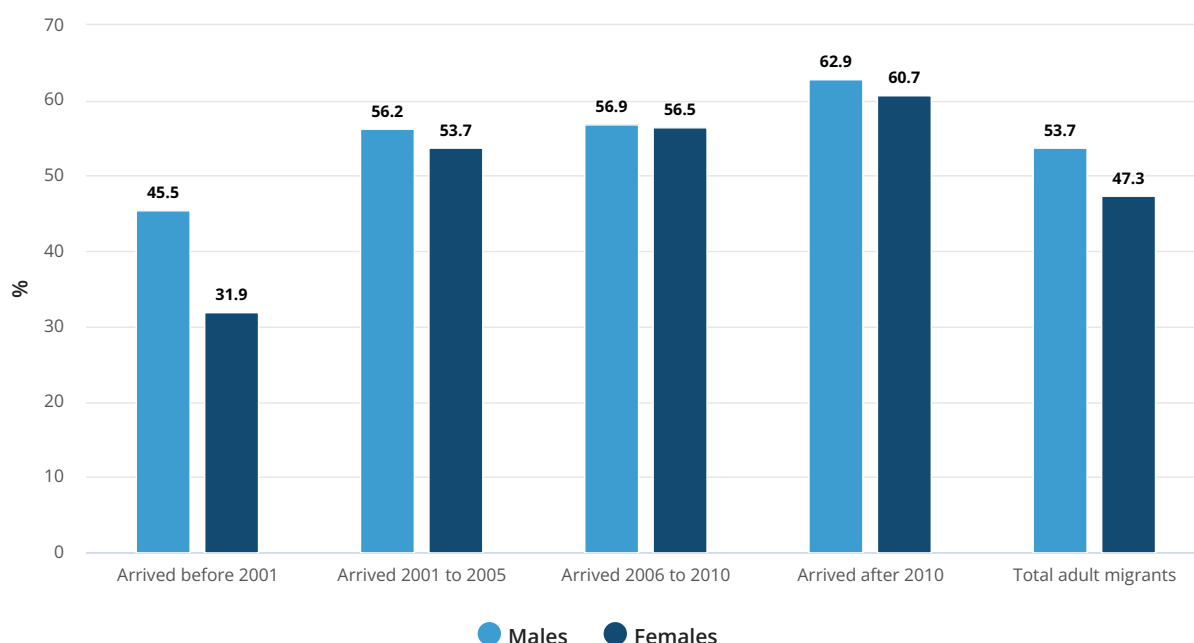
In this section the term 'adult migrants' refers to people born outside Australia who were at least 15 years of age when they migrated to Australia.

In 2015, 73% of adult migrants aged 15–64 years had a non-school qualification compared

with 58% of those born in Australia (Table 1 and 14).

The proportion of adult migrants who had a Bachelor degree or higher on arrival had increased from 23% for those who migrated before 2001 to 45% for those who migrated after 2010. The proportion of adult migrants who held a non-school qualification on arrival to Australia increased from 39% for those who arrived before 2001, to 62% for those arriving after 2010. This increase is most notable in female adult migrants, with 32% having a non-school qualification on arrival before 2001 compared with 61% for those arriving after 2010 (Table 14 and Graph 2).

**Graph 2: Adult migrants with a non-school qualification on arrival - by year of arrival and sex (a)**



a. Adult migrants aged 15 to 64 years

More than one third of adult migrants (37%) attained a non-school qualification after arrival in Australia. A similar proportion of male (36%) and female (37%) adult migrants had gained a non-school qualification since arriving in Australia (Table 14).

In 2015, 79% of employed adult migrants aged 15–64 years had a non-school qualification

compared with 65% of employed people born in Australia and 63% of employed migrants who arrived as children (aged less than 15 years) (Table 4).

Amongst employed adult migrants, 40% were working in a field relevant to their highest non-school qualification attained before arrival. One in three (33%) employed adult migrants had gained a qualification after arrival and were working in a field relevant to their highest qualification attained after arrival (Table 16).

Of employed adult migrants who held a non-school qualification on arrival to Australia, just over half (55% of males and 50% of females) were working in the same field as their highest qualification. A higher proportion (65% of male and 69% of female) who attained a non-school qualification after arrival were working in the field of their highest qualification gained after arrival (Table 16).

## Data downloads

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### Tables 1-3: Qualifications and the labour market

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### Tables 4-11: Relevance of qualification

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### Tables 12-13: Incomplete qualifications

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### Tables 14-16: Migrants and qualifications

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### Data item list

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## Previous catalogue number

This release previously used catalogue number 4235.0.

## Methodology

[Qualifications and work methodology, 2015](#)

